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The effect of self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program on the self-esteem of sixth grade students

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Abstract

The current study aims to examine the effect of a self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program on the self-esteem of sixth-grade students. The experimental design was constructed with one treatment group and one no-treatment control group and two measurements (pre and post). Twenty-four (13 female, 11 male) out of 166 sixth-grade students were randomly selected and assigned to a treatment group or a control group. The treatment group participated in an 8-week-long self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program. Pre-test and post-test scores of treatment and control groups were analyzed using Mixed Design Repeated-Measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Findings indicated a significant increase in the self-esteem scores of treatment-group subjects, as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI).

Keywords: Self-esteem, self-esteem enrichment program, bibliocounseling, bibliotherapy, sixth grade students.

1. Introduction

Self-esteem is a well-known construct in both the scientific and lay literature (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Gunbayi, 2006). Coopersmith (1967), one of the pioneers of self-esteem research, defined self-esteem as “an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy” (p. 5). As the developmental literature indicates, self-esteem changes with age (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006). Puberty is a dynamic period (Khanlou, 2004; Lawrence, 2006) in which significant psychological, physical, academic and personal changes occur (McCain, 2009). The sixth grade is an especially turbulent period that includes a transition from elementary to secondary school, which is characterized by significant changes such as entering a larger and more diverse social environment; academic challenges; and rapid physical, emotional and cognitive changes (L’Esperance, 2006). Given the vulnerability to self-esteem that may occur during this period, the promotion of positive self-feelings among adolescents that will help them to successfully incorporate changes takes on additional importance (Blyth & Traeger, 2001). As emphasized in the literature, enriching self-esteem can contribute to adolescents’ happiness, can help them to feel competent, confident, creative and goal-oriented and can assist them to solve problems more effectively (Behamdouni, 1993).

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Self-esteem improvement programs implemented in schools rely mainly on one of three approaches: the “teaching methods” approach, the “packaged program” approach and the “whole school” approach (Smith, 1998). Psychotherapeutic techniques such as rational emotive techniques, relaxation training (Adams, 1988), cognitive styles and reflective thinking methods (Marciano, 1991) have also been used to promote self-esteem. Bibliocounseling, defined as “the use of reading to produce affective change and to promote personality growth and development through a comprehensive analysis of literature” (Lenkowsky, 1987 p.123), has been found to be effective in enhancing self-esteem as well. Through bibliocounseling, children can experience emotional catharsis, develop new and productive solutions for life struggles and learn correct interactions by emulating literary characters similar to themselves (Gladding & Gladding, 1991; as cited in Meier-Jensen, 2001).

In Turkey, an extensive literature exists on the correlates of self-esteem such as gender, age, academic achievement, locus of control and test anxiety (e.g. Bilgin, 2001; Ünal, 2006) and on the effectiveness of self-esteem enrichment programs (e.g. Aksaray, 2003; Güloğlu, 1999; Sezer, 2001). A few studies have also examined the effectiveness of bibliocounseling. For example, Uçar (1996) examined the use of literature in guidance services and suggested books to be used by school counselors, and Yılmaz (2002) examined the effect of bibliocounseling on teen-parent conflicts. However, no study has examined the effectiveness of bibliocounseling enrichment programs on self-esteem of students in Turkey. Therefore, the current study was conducted to examine the effect of bibliocounseling on the self-esteem of 6th grade students in Turkey, with the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between treatment and control group participants’ post-test scores. Additionally, post-test self-esteem scores of treatment group participants were expected to be higher than their pre-test scores.

2. Method

An experimental design, with a treatment and a no-treatment control group and pretest-posttest measurements were used. The treatment group received self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling through an 8-session treatment program developed by the researchers. The control group participated in pre-test and post-test measurements without receiving any training.

2.1. Subjects

Study participants were comprised of 24 6th-grade students (13 female, 11 male) selected among 166 6th grade students (94 female, 72 male) attending a university-affiliated private middle school serving upper-middle to high-SES families in Ankara. The study was approved by the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee (HSEC). The t-test comparison showed no significant differences in the pre-test scores of treatment and the no-treatment (control) group [$t(22) = -.80, p = .43$].

2.2. Measure

Student self-esteem was measured using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), a self-report scale consisting of 58 items, 50 of which measure self-esteem and eight lie items which constitute a social desirability scale (Behamdouni, 1993). The self-esteem items are measured on a two point scale as “like me” and “unlike me”. The inventory yields scores between 0 and 100. Higher scores obtained from the inventory indicate positive self-esteem (Pişkin, 1996; as cited in Sert, 2003). Coopersmith (1967) reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of .88 after a five-week interval and .70 after a three-year interval. The Turkish version of the CSEI, adapted by Özoğlu (1988), includes 57 items (as cited in Ünal, 2007) and has been reported to have a Cronbach Alpha value of .77 (Özoğlu, 1988; as cited in Ünal, 2007) and KR-20 value of .81 (as cited in Ünal, 2007). The internal reliability evidence of KR-20, .92 for fourth grade students and .89 for seventh grade students were also reported (Ünal, 2007). The Cronbach alpha coefficient calculated for this study was .90 ($N=130$).

2.3. Procedure

The literature (e.g. Shechtman, 1999) shows that a cognitive behavioral approach can be used successfully in self-esteem enrichment programs. Therefore, the bibliocounseling self-esteem enrichment program examined in the

current study was developed within a cognitive behavioural framework. An initial literature review indicated that adolescent self-esteem may be linked to social and academic functioning, familial relationships and body image (O'Rourke & Worzbyt, 1996). Self-esteem of children has also been reported to be influenced by peer relationships, dealing with bullying (Lindenfield, 1997; O'Rourke & Worzbyt 1996), making future plans and setting goals, learning positive thinking and clearing away negative thoughts (Schiraldi, 2007; Lindenfield, 1997) and developing problem-solving skills (Lindenfield, 1997). Following a literature review, the researchers examined the annual reports (2003-2008) of the counseling service at the school where the study was to be conducted. These reports indicated that student self-esteem was related to that included bullying, relationships with peers and parents, physical appearance, academic success and goal setting. In view of these reports, as well as the earlier literature review, the topics addressed in the training program included changes occurring during adolescence, an exploration of character traits, dealing with negative thoughts, improving communication skills, coping with bullying, improving problem-solving skills and setting personal goals. The selection of the book to be used in the treatment process is of crucial priority in bibliocounseling (Mitchell-Kamalie, 2002). However, a thorough examination of children's books available in Turkey, researchers were unable to detect a book that could be used in the study. Therefore, the researchers undertook the task of writing a text that could appropriately address the self-esteem issues of the students in the specific school where the study was being conducted. The resulting 32-page story, entitled "The Close Friends," was about three children (2 boys and 1 girl) who were helping each other to cope with self-esteem issues. The story was composed of eight chapters, each of which constituted a treatment session.

During the course of implementation, the principle investigator read aloud one chapter of the story per session, which students were able to follow from their own copies. Students were then asked to summarize the story, and a structured post-reading discussion was conducted in which students were able to ask questions about the topic raised in the reading. This process enabled the participants to identify challenges in the feelings, relationships and behaviours of the character(s), in line with Crosby's (1963) observation that asking children to compare their own experiences with those of the character allows them to explore their own behaviours and feelings as well as their consequences. Children participating in the training sessions were able to make conclusions or generalizations about the topic through these discussions (as cited in Olsen, 2007). Furthermore, a follow-up activity was conducted with the aim of reinforcing the skills used by the characters in the story. As stated by Forgan (2002), activities allow students to identify the problem presented in the story, produce alternative solutions to the problem and evaluate the results of the chosen solution.

2.4. Data Analysis

Mixed Design (one between- and one within-factor) Repeated-Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to analyze the pre- and post-test global self-esteem (CSEI) scores of the treatment and no-treatment (control) groups.

3. Results

Results of Mixed Design, Repeated Measure ANOVA (Tables 1 and 2) indicated the main effect of time to be significant [Wilks $\lambda = .61$, $F(1,22)=13.57$ $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$] in favor of the treatment group. The interaction of time X group was also found to be significant [Wilks $\lambda = .78$, $F(1, 22) = 6.08$ $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .21$]. In other words, there were significant differences in pre- and post-test self-esteem scores between the treatment and no-treatment (control) groups.

Table 1. Means and Standard deviations of Self-esteem Scores for Treatment and No-treatment (Control) Groups

Descriptive Statistics	Measure	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Self-Esteem	Pre-test	Treatment	25	7.45	12
		Control	28	8.75	12
		Total	26	8.06	24
	Post-test	Treatment	33	10.62	12
		Control			

Control	29	10.14	12
Total	31	10.33	24

Table 2. (a) Results of Repeated Measures ANOVA for Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Source	Wilks ' λ '	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Between Subjects					
Group	0.99	1	0.03	0.00	0.84
Within Subjects					
Time	0.61	1	13.57	0.38	0.00
Time * Group	0.78	1	6.08	0.21	0.02

Table 2. (b) Interaction Contrasts

Comparison	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Treatment Group			
Pre-test vs. Post-test	11	-3.29	0.00
Control Group			
Pre-test vs. Post-test	11	-1.71	0.11

As Table 2 shows, self-esteem scores of the treatment group increased significantly from pre-test to post-test [$t(11) = -3.29$, $p < .05$], whereas no significant changes were seen in the no-treatment control group [$t(11) = -1.71$, $p = .11$]. These findings suggest that the self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program attended by the treatment group subjects was effective in increasing their self-esteem scores.

4. Discussion

This study found a self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program to be effective in enhancing the self-esteem of 6th grade students. The self-esteem enrichment bibliocounseling program designed for this study differed from other self-esteem enrichment and bibliocounseling programs in Turkey in three distinct ways, namely, the researchers authored their own reading material, and the treatment employed a cognitive-behavioral approach. Third, structured discussion of the topic, and extension activities were added to the program. In spite of differences in materials, treatment approach and age of participants, the findings of the present study were consistent with those of previous studies showing the positive effects of bibliocounseling on self-esteem (e.g. Kohutek, 1983; Meier-Jensen, 2001; Wadsworth, 2007).

Future research may be conducted to determine whether the training program used in this study can be adapted and used successfully to enhance self-esteem levels of middle-school students from different school types, SES levels, grade levels and cultures. In implementing the program in the future, limitations such as length of the training program, follow-up assessment, and group size should be taken into consideration.

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